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SUBJECT: AUSTRIA DISCUSSES ENERGY TIES WITH TURKMENISTAN

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¶1. (U) From July 27 to July 31, a 13-member Turkmen delegation attended the second meeting of the joint Austrian-Turkmen Commission for Intergovernmental and Foreign Trade Relations in Vienna. The commission was set up by a Memorandum of Understanding (reftel) signed by the two countries when Turkmenistan's President Berdymukhamenov visited Austria in November 2008. The governments are currently working on a draft agreement for the protection of energy investments.

¶2. (U) The Turkmen delegation was led by Deputy Oil and Gas Industry Minister Bayramgeldi Nediroy and Chamber of Commerce Chairman Palvan Taganov; it included several other deputy ministers and industry consultants. By contrast, the Austrians sent rather low-ranking participants from the Economics Ministry and the Austrian Economic Chamber. Since no one in either delegation had decision-making power, the session served as an informal discussion of joint economic projects, and specifically of production-sharing agreements in the energy sector and the exploration and extraction of hydrocarbon resources in the Caspian Sea area. A joint business forum to be held in Ashgabat in 2010 should nail down joint projects in other economic sectors.

¶3. (SBU) Our contact at OMV Gas International, Astrid Dolak, who participated at the meeting, reported that OMV is very interested in gas exploration and production projects in Turkmenistan. She opined that such meetings were building confidence between the political and economic shareholders of the two countries. She added that the atmosphere had improved significantly since last year. Dolak had the impression that Turkmenistan is now quite interested in cooperating with the Europeans in the energy sector and in becoming a supplier for the Nabucco pipeline.